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SUBJECT: UZBEKISTAN: ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS THAT WORK

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REFTELS:

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¶1. (SBU) Summary: English language programming is a bright spot in Embassy Tashkent's public diplomacy programming. With tight GOU control over most PD functions, English language programs provide an opportunity to establish and nurture relationships with students, educators, and university administrators. Posts full-time English Language Programs (ELP) Assistant has also been a key to success. With additional funding, Post could assist local trainers to implement small projects and replace the Soviet-era textbooks still in use around the country. End summary.

WHY ENGLISH LANGUAGE TRAINING?

¶2. (SBU) English language training accomplishes a number of key mission goals. Once Uzbeks learn English, they access non-governmental or non-Russian sources of information that present a fuller and more balanced picture of the world. Students of English also learn more about the culture of the West and its way of thinking. More importantly from the students point of view is that English speakers are in high demand from businesses and NGOs and can command higher salaries. Their increased skills and access to information make them key to Post goals to promote economic development in the region.

¶3. (SBU) No Fulbright scholars or students or Peace Corps volunteers currently work in Uzbekistan. Therefore, Uzbek teachers and students have few opportunities to interact with Americans, much less experienced teachers of English. There is overwhelming unmet demand for English language education, and although the GOU restricts many public diplomacy activities, officials are receptive to English language programs. The Minister of Higher Education (MHE) himself has expressed his support for English teaching programs. Not only do these programs contribute to education reform, but they offer valuable professional development opportunities to eager English teachers. At the same time they pave the way for Embassy staff to build relationships with key contacts and open new avenues for other public affairs programming, including distributing materials and publicizing exchange programs.

TECHNICAL TRAINING A SUCCESS

¶4. (SBU) Embassy Tashkent successfully administered two English Language (EL) Specialist programs in 2008, providing training in Tashkent, Ferghana, Bukhara, and Samarkand. These specialists trained Uzbek teachers of English in the fundamentals of academic and professional English writing and in student assessment. In both cases, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) and MHE assisted the Embassy to arrange workshops at local universities and with the national teachers association, the Uzbekistan Teachers of English Association (UzTEA).

¶5. (SBU) Both specialists visits provided opportunities to re-establish ties with provincial universities that had been broken when relations stumbled in 2005. As CAO and the English Language Programs Assistant FSN interacted with the teachers and university administrators in these cities, they began to rebuild trust and get a sense of the institutions needs, information that is invaluable for planning future assistance.

¶6. (SBU) After a year-long gap, Post successfully placed an English Language Fellow at a university in Tashkent. Not only has this placement been smooth logistically, but faculty and university leadership alike welcomed the American specialist. In this environment, the Fellow has developed a new writing program, including drafting syllabi for courses at all four levels of instruction. Through his daily involvement at the university, the Fellow and local teachers identified a need for content-based English instruction, a field still in its infancy in Uzbekistan. They worked jointly with PAS staff to request an EL Fellow for the 2009-10 year who will guide the university faculty to develop new content-based courses in subjects such as law and history.

¶7. (SBU) Empowering local Uzbek teachers to train each other is both effective and economical. Exchange opportunities such as the Fulbright Foreign Language Teaching Assistant (FLTA) Program and the Teaching Excellence and Achievement (TEA) program bolster the capacity of local teacher trainers. When post is able to recruit teachers from the regions as we have during the past two years, the participants return eager to apply new techniques to training

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teachers in both rural and urban areas outside of Tashkent. In this vein, Post welcomes initiatives such as the RELO-sponsored six-week training in Hyderabad, India, as it produces qualified trainers who have the knowledge and resources to conduct training independently throughout the country.

¶8. (SBU) Several alumni of English language teaching exchange programs in the U.S. have used Democracy Outreach/Alumni Small grants to offer cost-effective training to their peers and colleagues.

Examples include an English teacher in Fergana Valley, who trained 22 teachers for merely \$420, or \$19 per teacher. Another teacher in Bukhara organized a series of workshops targeted at 55 rural secondary school English teachers using a \$2,000 grant. The bang for the buck is huge.

OTHER SUCCESSES

¶19. (SBU) When the Regional English Language Officer (RELO) responsible for Central Asia was transferred from Tashkent to Astana in 2007, the RELO Assistant FSN position left with her. With English language programming so crucial to our efforts in Uzbekistan, PAS hired a full-time English Language Programs Assistant. This decision has been key to maintaining high-quality USG English Language Programming in Uzbekistan. Without an individual dedicated full-time to developing and monitoring English Language programs, it would have been impossible to maintain a level of service to teachers and educational institutions even close to that provided by the RELO.

¶10. (SBU) Teachers enthusiastically receive all materials Post provides, from Scholastic Ambassador sets, Forum magazines, to donated copies of TOEFL test preparation books, and put them to use immediately. The FSN that focuses on English language programs carefully tracks prior donations and additional resource needs of individual institutions, in order to maximize the impact of all donations. There is no doubt we could place many times over the number of materials we have.

¶11. (SBU) Post also runs the successful English Access Microscholarship Program in three regions of Uzbekistan with new synergies developing this year. The EL Fellow began offering English writing courses to Access teachers in Tashkent to develop their skills and show them how to teach writing to their students. The Embassys Public Affairs Section has involved Access alumni in events on a larger scale than in the past. Access alumni are regular visitors to the Embassys weekly Chai Chat Conversation Club and also attend special events such as the 2nd Annual International Education Fair and the Embassys American Film Festival last fall.

¶12. (SBU) Both Access teachers and students recognize the success of the program. They frequently tell Embassy staff about the dramatic impact that involvement in Access has had on the students English skills and their confidence. Teachers at the students regular schools now ask the Access students to help with English language activities at school. During the Access Summer Camp in 2008, Access students were invited to teach English lessons to other children in the camp. Several of the Access alumni who completed the program in 2008 also gained admission to prestigious high schools in Tashkent, and the students are now well-placed to enter equally prestigious universities. The investments of the past are starting to bear fruit.

¶13. (SBU) Astana-based RELO Andrea Schindler has provided helpful support for Embassy Tashkents Public Affairs Section whenever possible. The RELOs tips on effectively using EL Fellows and collaborating with other organizations such as the British Council have been helpful to post, as she brings years of expertise to administering English language programs.

AN ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAMS WISH LIST

¶14. (SBU) With additional funding, Post could have an even greater impact. Additional funds would allow Post to offer grant opportunities and teaching resources to teachers, and increase the number of exchange program slots available each year.

¶15. (SBU) Post hopes to establish a Small Project Assistance (SPA) program for local English teachers with the goal of supporting activities that further educational reform in Uzbekistan. Teachers could apply to the Embassy for small grants to organize extra-curricular activities that promote knowledge of American values, mutual understanding, cultural awareness and English language studies; design/organize teacher training programs and workshops for

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English teachers; set up or enhance mini Resource Centers at local educational institutions or language centers; or develop/review/publish curriculum, textbooks and English language learning materials. This program would also help them acquire basic grant writing and project management experience and motivate them to introduce innovative ideas and techniques into their schools and communities.

¶16. (SBU) Post would use additional funds to expand and formalize its current efforts to donate books and other teaching resources to educational institutions. The demand here for materials in English cannot be overstated. Supplying English Language learning materials to resource-starved schools and universities in remote regions generates enormous good will to the USA.

¶17. (U) Educational exchange opportunities for teacher training, continue to be an effective tool to encourage English language training in Uzbekistan and to improve its quality. To that end, Post could fill additional slots in the TEA program. Currently, post is able to send 6-7 teachers a year, but with sufficient notification, Post feels confident that we could recruit 10-15 quality participants each year.

¶18. (SBU) Post requires funding for administering and monitoring programs. Post learned just last week that it may not receive any funding from ECA to administer the TEA program for the 2010-11 academic year (reftel A). This will further stress PASs already strained budget, as the TEA program costs between \$4,000 and \$5,000 a year in-country to administer. As a rule, PAS receives no resources from ECA to administer the FLTA program, which consumes approximately \$3,000 to \$4,000 a year from the PD budget to cover administrative costs.

COMMENT

¶19. (SBU) Embassy Tashkent feels strongly about the need for English Language Officers resident at each post of a country with a sizeable population. Uzbekistan is, next to Afghanistan, by far the most populous country in Central Asia. When the RELO position moved to Astana, most of the RELOs budget became consumed with the increased travel costs out of Kazakhstan, having a detrimental effect on the RELOs ability to support programs. Tashkent lost the RELO position because the GOU discontinued accrediting regional officers and not because there was an operational imperative to move the position. At

the recent PAO conference in Washington, many of the Central Asian posts expressed frustration with the lack of resources to support English language programs. At the conference we heard that the new administration is aware of the enormous value of English language programs; one way to ensure we get the most out of those programs is to have an ELO resident in each country.

¶20. (SBU) English language programs work, both in Uzbekistan and around the world. Some very effective forms of English language programming and training, such as sending a Fellow to live in Tashkent for a year, are expensive but have a profound impact. There are also many lower cost ways to support English teachers and expand access to higher quality English instruction, including offering small grants to trainers, supplementing existing teaching materials, and continuing the Access program. Post hopes to see continued support from Washington to offer both types of opportunities to English teachers and students in Uzbekistan. End comment.
NORLAND

To view the entire SMART message, go to URL http://repository.state.sgov.gov/_layouts/OSS_SearchResults.aspx?k=messageid:674910bd-d723-4834-a8